

Owens Valley Water Commission

Elected Members of the Commission:

Stanley T. Summers (Bishop)
Monty J. Bengochia (Bishop)
Virgil Moose (Big Pine)
Genevieve Jones (Big Pine)
Thomas Swab (Lone Pine)
Richard Button (Lone Pine)

Environmental Director: Teri Red Owl

EPA Funding (2014-2015)

Tribal Travel Fund	\$119,999
Tribal EPA Conference	\$162,585
GAP	\$343,358
Total	\$625,942

Owens Valley Indian Water Commission

The Owens Valley Indian Water Commission is a Tribal Consortium whose member Tribes include the Bishop, Big Pine, and Lone Pine Tribes located in the Owens Valley. The board of the Tribal consortium consists of six members, two from each member Tribe. All board members have served on their respective Tribal governing bodies; two board members are the Tribal Chairman and Vice Chairman for the Bishop and Big Pine Tribes and another is an elected Tribal officer of the Big Pine Tribe. Currently, the Commission is involved in water rights issues, water resource protection, environmental education, and environmental protection.

Annual Tribal-EPA Conference

The Commission is responsible for planning and administering the 2015 Tribal-EPA Conference.
Contact: Morena Villanueva, 415-947-4238

GAP

Under GAP, the Commission employs an Environmental Director, Environmental Assistant, Environmental Specialist, and a Secretary/Bookkeeper. In FY15, the Commission is hosting a regional training on developing EPA/Tribal Environmental Plans and hosting a drought workshop, organizing a community clean-up, and coordinating a region-wide videoconference center.
Contact: Damian Willson, 415-972-3453

Water Rights

In 1994, DOI appointed a Federal Fact Finding Team which concluded that the Bishop, Big Pine and Lone Pine Tribes were not receiving all of the water they were entitled to on their current reservations. During that same year the Tribes, through the Owens Valley Indian Water Commission and BIA, performed an Indian reserved water rights (Winters Rights) quantification study for the exchanged lands of the Owens Valley Indians. In July 1995, a Federal Water Rights Negotiation Team was appointed by the Department of the Interior to facilitate negotiations on the quantified water rights figure on behalf of the Bishop, Big Pine and Lone Pine Tribes. The team was unsuccessful in assisting the Tribes with reaching an acceptable settlement of the water rights. In late 1997 the negotiations came to a standstill. In the fall of 1998, new ground rules were set between the Tribes for the negotiations. The Bishop, Big Pine and Lone Pine Tribes made a determination via Tribal resolution that just those three Tribes should be involved in the water rights negotiations related to the exchanged lands and would be the only Tribes sharing in the settlement. The decision is based on the fact that the water rights that are being negotiated are attached to lands that were traded to provide a land base for the three reservations and that the negotiations would be more productive if just the affected Tribes participated. In the past the Benton and Fort Independence Tribes (former Commission Member Tribes) attended the negotiation sessions and participated as support Tribes. The Benton and Fort Independence Tribes currently possess water rights on their respective reservations.

With the Commission voting to abide by the Tribal resolutions, the Commission's Articles of Incorporation and By-laws were amended. The amendments clarified that the water rights negotiations related to the 1939 Land Exchange would involve just the Bishop, Big Pine and Lone Pine Tribes but that the Commission would continue to provide environmental- and water-related services to its other member Tribes.

Contact: Howard Kohan, 415-972-3143

The OVIWC is in the fourth year of a five year CWA106 Grant for water quality monitoring, data storage and data analysis mentors for their member tribes. The Tribes in Owens Valley are strong watershed advocates and, with OVIWC assistance, have been able to serve on the Inyo-Mono Integrated Water Management Group with LADWP and Fish and Wildlife.

Contact: Howard Kohan, 415-972-3143